

1: Ootode

SH6 Yahgan SH6

622, 754, 755, 776, 787, 789, 791, 793, 874

[Information on various aspects of Yahgan culture which are closely related to the characteristics and activities of the yékamuś or medicine-man, including his training, role as a community leader, curer, sorcerer, and custodian of religious lore, have been marked for category 756 and will be found under that classification.]

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856 properly, to become well-proportioned, and to develop a beautiful figure.

856 That this treatment of the infant is not without a tinge of
789 magic may be seen from the way it is concluded. As soon as a woman ceases the prolonged stroking, she clenches her hands and puts her fists to her mouth so that the bent thumbs touch her lips. With a sharp thrust she extends her arms out in front of her and opens her fists, palms forward and fingers outstretched. At the same time she expels her breath in a sharp "pš," as though the "un-beautiful, ugly, /723/ deformed" had been gathered together with the hands and were now being blown away. One sees this motion being practiced a great deal by the yékamuš.

856 In this wisa process every woman is, of course, extremely gentle and sensitive; she is careful not to press on the fontanel, ayyataia, which she knows to be a very sensitive spot. For about three weeks the new infant must submit to this forming, stroking, and arranging of his little body. It causes him not the slightest discomfort.

855 The following belongs in the category of superstition. When
854 the sea duck, děska (Tachyeres patachonicus), flies over the hut,
774 all the occupants are startled, for they are afraid that it will take away the "spirit," that is, the vitality of the children. The adults hasten to cover all the children with pieces of leather and, with outstretched arms, they grope through the air, as though they were trying to hold back "the spirit" of the children. As though they had gathered it up in the air, they draw their arms in again and make a proffering and throwing motion toward the children, at the same time uttering a long-drawn-out "š." It is well known that immediately after birth the parents may not eat the meat of děska, otherwise the life of the child is endangered (p. 503).

854 Most of the day the babies move freely or lie in the mother's lap. With their little hands they touch and grasp everything they can reach. They are given individual small stones and sticks, mussel shells, and little twigs that happen to lie nearby, but the Yamana do not make actual toys. Perhaps it is too much trouble for them always to take along and carefully store toys, no matter how simple. It seems to me that Yamana babies, compared to those on Isla Grande, are much quieter and much less inclined to play. True, the mother puts all kinds of small necklaces around her darling, in order to adorn

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invoke the power from above in order to be able to take part wholeheartedly in the social games.

881 Every social game, just like every dance, finishes off with
524 a loud hō, hō... or hē, hē..., which anyone utters and which is
789 repeated by others. As we know, the constant singing is supposed to keep the evil Yetaita (361) and other dangerous spirits away

361. The following allusion does not seem to me superfluous: although soon after the start of the youth initiation the candidates are taught that "Yetaita" as such does not exist, nevertheless this supposed evil spirit is mentioned again and again, as though he were the essence of all evil powers and anxious fears which could bring great harm to the participants.

from the Īēxau hut. The social games also have this secondary purpose. This is clearly shown during a game or during the transition from one to another when many a dancer, out of inner agitation, pulls vigorously on the hut framework and causes the whole structure to shake violently. As though alarmed, he utters the brief word "Īēxau," shouting it loudly, as though it were an incantation or a means of warding off malevolent spirits. Finally another person will drum on the ground loudly and frantically with both fists, likewise to ward off all evil. The dancers are most stirred up to such outbursts of fear when they are already exhausted from singing and playing and are bathed in perspiration. Then their shouts and their desperate behavior have all the more threatening effects. Thus we see how these people, despite all their joy in the games, never depart altogether from the serious keynote of the Īēxau celebration.

881 There is another custom which has the same purpose. Oc-
789 casionally two, three, or four women run along the interior of the
751 hut wall and beat the back of their hands or their fists against the framework. They do so to scare away the evil spirits that might annoy the people present. They also want to drive off the spirits that cause illness, /944/ so that they will forever stay away from

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this xiexaus. In olden times it was the task of the yekamu to "cleanse" the Great Hut from such evil influences, above all to ward off sickness and push it far away so that the nerves and muscles of the people present, which sometimes become tired and slack, remain vigorous. At the present time all this is the aim of the women who hasten through the interior and beat against the wall of the hut with their fists, with branches, or with a stick. The malevolent spirits are driven away, and all the participants retain their strength undiminished.

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Finally, something Nelly once told me belongs here. Among her western group, which was to a certain extent influenced by the Halakwulup, masks were worn in former times, and these also served to entertain and encourage all the inmates of the xiexaus hut. Out-of-doors a man or woman would put on a disguise unobserved, for which they chose exclusively the long stems of a species of grass which is scarcely to be found today (362). The person would cover his head far below the neck

362. Presumably it was Dactylis (Poa) flabellata which was also used as litter for the sleeping-place (p. 25). The stems are sometimes longer than the height of the adult Yamana and therefore very suitable for this masquerade. Today one hardly ever sees such tall stems.

with a closely woven hood of this grass in the shape of a truncated cone. Two small holes were opened for the eyes. From the neck to the ankles another woven piece covered the whole body like a tight shift. Both arms could be drawn through two sufficiently large openings, and the arms, too, including the hands, were covered with this woven material and pressed close to either side of the body. At the proper moment, this masked person would shuffle into the Great Hut and for a considerable time would stand upright, motionless and stiff, in the center aisle. Sometimes the person very slowly moved a little farther inside so that the other people could look at him more closely. On rare occasions the masker would also sit down. The group would examine

/1305/ β. Superstitions in Everyday Life

82/ From careful, continuous observation the Yamana are familiar with their natural surroundings. Every unusual phenomenon attracts their attention more or less, and some have occasioned superstitious interpretations. They do not occupy themselves nearly as much or as thoroughly with the heavenly bodies as do the Selk'nam. If an eclipse of the sun or moon occurs, they all pick up some šiler² /fine Berberis shavings/. Amid much shouting, men, women, and children rub their faces with it, as though they were washing and cleansing themselves. They shout and expect the sun or moon to become clean and shining once more. Since they themselves cannot reach that heavenly body, but it must nevertheless be cleaned, they rub their own faces continuously, for, to them, an eclipse of the sun or moon means an unclean, dirty face of that celestial body. They designate an eclipse of the sun (or moon) with lēm (or hānuxa) arugáta, meaning "sun or moon with a dirty, very disorderly, and unclean face" (compare arugáta in BD:61). Similarly, they designate a star that conspicuously changes its color, or a shooting star and a comet with a visible tail, as apē² nix arugáta, "a star that is in disorder." If there is a ring around the moon and an opening in the ring at one point of the compass, they expect bad weather from this direction for the next few days. Children may not stare at a full moon for any length of time. The Yamana believe that while the child is gazing steadily at the moon it will see the moon's large mouth and invariably call out: "You, moon, open your mouth!" This would result in the child's soon becoming ill. The Yamana, too, see an entire face, with eyes and mouth, in the disk of the full moon.

Our Indians, of course, are also attentively concerned about the weather. If a number of people are traveling in their canoe and they eat something, they may not throw refuse and food remains into the water, for this would immediately cause high waves or storm. The remains are carefully burned in the canoe fire.

82/ 789 When a child is born, the Yamana notice whether there is good or bad weather. A child born in good weather has prospects of a happy life; above all he is capable of stopping bad weather.

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789 If a few families are detained in an inlet because of storms and showers and are prevented from traveling on, they paint a club, a spear shaft, or an oar with red earth, accompany the "fair-weather child" to the beach, and give it the painted article, telling it to beat the sea with it and ask for favorable weather. If the child acts shy or ashamed, or if it is too young to do this, the father takes the child in his arms and sets it upright against his legs. He himself then recites the particular words /1306/ and administers the blows against the sea, making the child's arms help him a bit. It is absolutely necessary that the object used for beating be painted. The words addressed to the bad weather are to the effect that it should go away quickly, cease bothering people, and make way for good weather. A request is even sent up to Watauinéjwa that he change the weather situation as soon as possible, for after all he is responsible for unfavorable weather. For example, they say:

<u>Wéla</u>	<u>matáuigu</u>	<u>īkamána</u>	<u>yelaiāgu</u>
At once	to come to the beach	snowfall	good-weather
<u>xéqla</u> ,	<u>sigája</u>	<u>kakūpa</u>	<u>áki</u> .
child	set off	from here	you.

This is to say: "In order that you, bad weather, shall immediately go away from here, a privileged fair-weather child has come down to the beach and is beating you." Meanwhile the child stretches out its arms and reaches out into space as though it were grasping the clouds, tearing the fog asunder, and pushing back showers of rain. At the same time it utters forceful, hissing ŷt sounds. These efforts serve the purpose of quickly driving away the bad weather. The words used are clothed in a definite formula; an adult tells it to the child who repeats it several times while it beats the water.

821 A child born when the weather is unfavorable or when there are heavy storms arouses a slight uneasiness among people in the neighborhood as a result of this fact alone. They never forget this coincidence and in later years tell the child himself about it. Such a child must be reserved and moderate in its behavior when

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821 the weather is calm and there is bright sunshine. The Fuegians generally hope that the good weather, which in any case is scarce, will last for a short time once it has set in, especially the warm quiet days. For this reason a "bad-weather child" must avoid noisy conduct along the beach, running gaily along the edge of the water, throwing stones into the sea, beating the waves with a stick or paddle, or dropping an object and letting it strike hard on the ground. To violate these rules would soon bring a change of weather. The adults do not fail to watch a "bad-weather child" carefully and to admonish it to behave cautiously. If a strong headwind and high waves make it impossible for a family to travel on, the wife will try a ceremony of her own to remove these obstacles. She rubs one of her daughters who is not yet five years old from head to foot with imi, accompanies her down to the beach, pushes her into the water several times and ducks her repeatedly. The woman continues this procedure until her small daughter grows tired of it and begins to cry and scream. Only then does she release her daughter who, /1307/ yelling loudly, rushes out of the water to warm herself at the hut fire. The mother, however, stays on the beach a bit longer and addresses the following lament to the sea:

<u>Yelajāgu</u>	<u>xéolan</u>	<u>sigāia</u>	<u>wéla</u>	<u>tumūru</u>
Fair-weather	child	set off	immediately	have pity

īkamāna.
snowfall.

In other words: "You, bad weather, have pity on that 'fair-weather child' and set off immediately, taking with you this abundant snowfall." With this act, especially the ducking, the mother pretends that her child is drowning in the sea because of the bad weather.

The winter of mid-1923 was unusually severe and brought with it a great deal of snow. I was staying on Navarino Island, and the Indians often complained to me about the burden of the large masses of snow. One day they again tried an ancient ceremony which serves to ward it off. Near the huts two men erected

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a snow figure resembling a human being. It was about 120 centimeters high, very clumsy and irregular, the kind of snowman that school children in Europe fashion without any care. The head, body, and arms were merely suggested on the figure and very inaccurately fashioned. The men made it in a few minutes. Meanwhile several children and a few adults had assembled in front of it. As soon as the two men declared their clumsy structure finished, everybody gathered in front of it at a distance of about five meters and pelted it with stones, logs, clubs, and spears, in a spirit of savage destruction, until the wobbly structure was completely torn apart and lay there as a chaotic pile of snow. The excited, wild behavior is supposed to make clear to "winter," who is believed to be embodied in this figure, how displeased, indeed embittered, everybody is with him and that he should take himself off as soon as possible. They anticipate prompt success with this ceremony which has been handed down by their forefathers, and they resort to it several times during the cold season (264).

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264. As early as 1865 Bridges observed the same thing: "The Fuegians, to drive such unpleasant weather away, build a figure of the snow, in shape somewhat like a man, and throw spears into it, and demolish it with paddles" /cited in English/ (VSA:XII, 6;1865). -- The Selk'nam also try to change the weather by means of a certain magical custom, in which a so-called "bad-weather child" and a "fair-weather child" play the chief roles (Vol. I, 684).

Bridges reported another custom which is also of the type of genuine magic-by-analogy; I myself did not come across it. On a stormy day "all men were disguised with paint and charcoal. The men came along, many armed with clubs. One man, Lasapowloom, a vigorous, active young fellow, acted the champion and challenger, and stood prominently forward to meet the foremost and most excited of the opposite party. Like the man

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82/ who confronted him, he had a broad band of white from his chin
 789 downward, and his head was bound with the skin of a kelp gander
 with white down on it, and his hair was also whitened. He had a
 white stone in either hand. His antagonist, who came leaping
 along making much noise, was /1308/ armed with a club. He
 kept on demanding what facasi [a term for seals, penguins, and
 other sea birds] would let him kill some one, as though he
 thirsted for blood. He held his club ready to use it, and they
 both spoke excitedly and loudly to each other. Presently
 Lasapowloom threw one of his stones a full yard behind his op-
 ponent's heels, and ran after his stone to pick it up again. Pres-
 ently looking to where I heard much noise I saw two others,
 highly painted fellows, engaged in loud vociferations and earnest
 gestures, each with an arm round the other's neck, and bobbing
 their heads each to the other. The rest stood quietly looking
 on. . . . Lasapowloom acting the part he did, was according to cus-
 tom, called tsworoo, or the storm of wind; the man who met
 him was called tumoozsworoo, or one who invited the storm to
 rage against him" /cited in English/ (MM:IX, 13:1875).

I cannot help thinking that the superstitious customs and
 ceremonies aimed at influencing the weather in favor of personal
 wishes and intentions have developed among the Yamana only to
 a limited extent simply because their Watañinēwa is regarded as
 the actual ruler of the forces of nature. Hence everyone turns
 directly to him as the first and surest helper, using the ancient
 traditional prayer formulas (p. 978).

262 In addition, there are a few similar superstitious customs
 824 which are clearly wise food taboos. They are supposed to pro-
 mote self-control and check selfishness. A few such decrees
 have already been mentioned. Thus, for example, no one may
 pick Pernettya berries until they are ripe. If anyone should
 ignore this, the "berries would go away" (p. 327). Anyone who
 gathers amāim at the proper time may nibble a few, but anyone
 who eats many of them brings on bad weather by his lack of re-
 straint in eating. It is easy to catch this disobedient person, and
 he is severely reproached in case there is a sudden change in the
 weather. The primary object of this taboo is probably to force
 each individual to bring all the berries he has gathered into camp

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827 painting and rubbing, the new skin finally becomes visible in about three weeks, the old masters interpret it as a sign that the uŭjáléxamuŭ in question really has a call for their vocation, and they show their joy in mutual mental visions. Now the apprentice must rub the cheek region with renewed diligence until, after another three or more weeks, this second delicate skin also disappears, and a third, still finer and more sensitive, appears. This skin is so soft and sensitive that it cannot be touched without causing penetrating pain. The uŭjáléxamuŭ who is the first among all the apprentices to develop this third, extremely fine skin arouses the greatest hopes and is regarded as the most successful pupil. As soon as this third, extremely sensitive skin is formed among the rest of the apprentices, the elders conclude the lōjma-yékamuŭ. Naturally, the experienced teachers recognize this alteration of the skin in /1407/ their mental visions and inform each other in brief words which are understandable to all the pupils. This is not a case of mechanically destroying the real skin of the face; rather, by a process of auto-suggestion, the uŭjáléxamuŭ believe in the alleged changes which the old teachers audibly discuss. They also say that this extraordinary sensitivity of the facial skin gradually disappears, but that the skin remains very delicate. In connection with the alteration in the skin of the face, the rest of the skin and the entire body are transformed into that phantom body which all yékamuŭ are supposed to have.

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789 In the course of the lōjma-yékamuŭ the old masters repeatedly perform two kinds of movements for which they show great preference. They pass both cupped hands over the hut fire and capture, so to speak, a handful of warmth which they pour out, as it were, over the head of an apprentice. They do this at least three times in succession. They also catch warmth from the hut fire in only one cupped hand, with the arm outstretched, and move it along in such a way that their cupped hand rests on the mouth of an apprentice; they fairly pour warmth into him. It is said that these two movements remove a sort of impenetrable wall of fog from the eyes of the uŭjáléxamuŭ; from now on he can see the spirits without interference and nothing can hinder his singing.

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X756
755 to make him well! Give the sick man courage and give him back his health, for my sake!" Obviously the yékamuš is sincere when he addresses these words and other ancient prayer formulas to Watañinēiwa so that the sick person will be quickly cured. The yékamuš, however, is also impelled by ambition; since he wants to prove his ability to the people by any means, he even calls on Watañinēiwa for help and relies on his favorable relations with him. If a few members of the same family have died in quick succession, it may happen that a friendly yékamuš will say to the survivors: "That yékamuš [he designates him by name] has caused these deaths!" It is a universal belief that only Watañinēiwa can cause a person to die. In the case just mentioned the people will complain to Watañinēiwa; they will accuse him of being in collusion with that yékamuš and of acting with him. They will say, for instance: "Hitapñan, why did you join that yékamuš and, with him, kill our relatives?" This is a cry from a heart tormented by grief and is similar to the well-known cries of mourning (p. 989).

B. General Assistance

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824 The individual Yamana, as well as the independent family groups, will turn to a friendly yékamuš in all kinds of daily distress. Although I often heard, "Hidñbuan causes bad weather, Hidñbuan sends the heavy snow and the bad storms!" nevertheless the Yamana also attribute to their yékamuš a definite influence on the weather (333). Who would not like to have calm, clear,

333. Bridges (l):18 and (k):237 asserted in his day that the medicine men "had power to procure good weather and drive away bad" /cited in English/.

and warm weather down there in the Cape Horn Archipelago? In winter the families like to crowd their dwellings together so that a few yékamuš are together for a longer period. If on occasion heavy snowstorms continue and the people become sad, the yékamuš will promise them: "Be quiet and remain brave, tomorrow [or the

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day after tomorrow] favorable weather will set in!" The children, above all, become quiet, and the old people are full of expectation. Sure enough, on the day announced the snowstorm at least abates and perhaps there is even a cloudless sky. /1422/ Once on a rainy day I also heard: "Tomorrow uxápu [the constellation Orion, p. 1276 /untranslated/] will appear!" On another winter's day a yékamuš assured the people: "Tomorrow we shall see Yqálox-tármuxipa again and that will usher in good weather!" Sure enough, each time the prognostication was fulfilled. The question is whether those yékamuš were guided by knowledge derived from experience and careful observation? I cannot decide. In any case, the people ascribe the change of weather to the superior knowledge and ability of the yékamuš. As is known, a number of medicine men gather together in the lōima-yékamuš. Since they jointly exert their influence on the forces of nature, the people say that favorable weather prevails for the duration of that affair.

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When there are persistent storms, the people are hindered in their freedom of movement and sometimes suffer great privation. Then the yékamuš must save them by furnishing food. He lies down to sleep, starts his čōwánni song, and thus invokes the čōwánni spirits. The latter have whole swarms of herring with them and these, of course, are accompanied by many other species of animals. They soon cover the beach near the people in distress. In the same way the čōwánni spirits drive many round crabs (Lithodes antarctica, Fig. 13 /in untranslated portion/) up on the beach or cause many birds to light on nearby stones. The yékamuš also uses another helper. In his dream he calls an ašōula to him and describes to it the threatening situation of his family group. Thus prevailed upon, the ašōula returns to its region, and from there on the next day it leads a whale with its accompanying animals to the stricken group (p. 1268 /untranslated/). As soon as the people see the many animals, they rejoice and thank their yékamuš for this rescue: he finally releases the helpful spirits with his čōwánni song, and they once more retire far out on the high seas. If the men plan a joint hunting expedition the following day, the yékamuš assemble the day before and start the čōwánni song. This is supposed to assure them the help of these spirits on the following day and at the same time guarantee the

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hunters success. While they sing, they stare into the distance, stretch out both arms, open their hands and clutch the air, draw their closed hands back to their bodies, open them, press them against the chest and, with gentle pressure, down to their knees. As they do so they repeat a shrill st several times. With these movements they wish to invoke the kēspix of the game animals, attract them, and gain power over them. The next day the men set out full of confidence.

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The Yamana believe that their medicine men can see into the future and that they have infallible prescience. The yékamuš themselves are especially convinced of this and give advance warnings to individuals. They also may admonish their whole group to be careful or may announce the prospect of a favorable event. On March 22, 1923, I was standing with several people when Mašemikens said very distinctly: "Outside I see a long /1423/ canoe approaching with touwisiwa [Phalacrocorax olivaceus]!" Sure enough, the following day the people sighted unusually dense flocks of these birds which seldom cross a channel in such numbers. On another occasion Emilia stared out at the ocean like a seeress and cried: "The sea is getting white, mountains of waves are forming and a great deal of foam is gathering!" Her words sounded strange to us, since the surface of the water was entirely smooth. The next morning, however, bad weather came up from the east, causing high waves, and we remembered that Emilia had announced this change at noon of the preceding day. A few people said in wonder: "How remarkable it is that our yékamuš know so many things in advance!"

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If the population in general is struck by illness, either because they have eaten spoiled meat or, more recently, because of an epidemic brought by Europeans -- something that the yékamuš occasionally foresee in a dream -- the medicine men feel obliged to help immediately. They are told in a dream at what place all the people must assemble. They announce the place and without delay call the people together to a makāinkina. First, a big fire is kindled. All the adults and children stand around it. As soon as this circle begins to move, everybody raises his fists, wails in hollow sounds, and interjects frequent loud cries of tē tē. Finally they seize glowing sticks of wood and toss them high in the